DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 047 656 HE 002 035

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TITLE Neo Monachism: A Coming Role for Church-Related Higher Education.
INSTITUTION Association of American Colleges, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 70
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Wingspread Conference on the Contribution of the Church-Related College to the Public Good, December, 1968

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Church Related Colleges, *General Education, *Higher Education, *Institutional Role, *Private Colleges, Systems Approach, Technology, Universities, Values

ABSTRACT

The coming role of the church-related undergraduate college of the liberal arts and sciences will be essentially monastic, or rather, it will be compelled toward a form of neo-monachism if it is to pursue seriously its historically proclaimed goals of liberal education. The contemporary university is the heart of "the self-sufficient finitude," the autonomous value system which rolls along according to a process that is causal but not directed to ends. The university has become the most relevant system ever devised for the technological society, and it is this relevance, this soul-destroying efficiency, that has brought the university into conflict with the new generation, i.e., those who have an apocalyptic rather than technocratic orientation toward the future. Yet most of the analyses of "university trouble" continue to search for new techniques to improve the system instead of confronting the real issue, which is the conflict between the uses of the multiuniversity and the value system of the new generation. The private college of general education will have to go into spiritual seclusion in order not to succumb to the dominance of technique. In contrast to the multiuniversity, the purpose of the college will be to create an educational experience around those values which form the basis of man's freedom as an intuitive, spontaneous, creating, valuing creature. (Editor/AF)

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Neo Monachism: A Coming Role for Church-Related Higher Education

Wesley A. Hotchkiss

I would like to propose for our edification and delight that the coming role of the church-related undergraduate college of the liberal arts and sciences will be essentially monastic. I offer this not as a despairing relegation of the church college to irrelevant oblivion, but as a great aspiring hope for a new, desperately needed form of higher education for our time. Perhaps I am needlessly shouldering the weight of a discredited symbol, but I know of no other symbol to express the desperation I feel for a new definition of higher education. I am proposing this in great seriousness and urgency.

If the monastic symbol is a bit ponderous for this purpose, let us try to extract the germinal concept and reinvest it in contemporary times. At its best, the monastic movement, at least in its cenobitic forms, was the effort of an intentional community to seclude itself from temporal concerns in order to devote itself to religion. This was a rather drastic response to overwhelming and pervasive forces in the general social situation. The present role of the church-related undergraduate college of the liberal arts and sciences is in a disturbingly similar situation with respect to the technological society in general and to the educational establishment in particular. The college may be compelled toward a form of neo-monachism if it is to pursue seriously its historically proclaimed goals of liberal education. For anyone seriously to propose such a role, there must be a rather gloomy evaluation of the state of the general society. I admit to being basically gloomy as I contemplate the erosion of the essential spirit of man under the depredations of unlimited and continual technological progress.

I have plenty of distinguished company in my gloomy analysis of the predicament of modern man. The late Paul Tillich said it in one much-quoted reference to "the self-sufficient finitude." Others have elaborated his analysis with volumes of perceptive data. Jaques Ellul, the French lawyer, uses the word

HE002035

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"technique" to describe this autonomous value system which rolls along "according to a process which is causal but not directed to ends." He goes on to say,

> "Modern man's state of mind is completely dominated by technical values and his goals are represented only by such progress and happiness as is to be achieved through techniques."

The power of our technology is symbolized in The Bomb, but this is the eternalized and dramatically visible kind of technical power. The more subtle kind of power is the total domination over the mind and spirit of man in which our human freedom as spontaneous, creative, unorthodox, unique individuals disappears. As Ellul says: "When power becomes absolute, values disappear."

This is dramatically illustrated whenever I talk to my neighbors on Long Island who are the systems engineers for Grumman. They put two men on the moon by organizing thousands of human beings into systems in which the men and the machines are indistinguishable. These men have been spiritually captured to the extent that they really believe these systems can solve any problem presented to them, and they probably can. As Apollo 12 was streaking toward another moon landing, the *Wall Street Journal* reported on the bitter struggle inside NASA between the engineers and the scientists. The engineers had so totally committed themselves to the techniques of getting there and back that they could not understand those scientists who think the purpose of going there was to extend knowledge. For the engineers, the systems are ends in themselves. The power of technique is absolute, but its values have disappeared. We have the illusion that we can direct our technique toward selected ends and purposes, but actually the process itself is causal and the values have disappeared.

The contemporary university is the heart (or should we say the computer center) of "the self-sufficient finitude." Among the recognized leaders of the established universities there is a consensus expressed by former President Perkins of Cornell in the opening sentences of his book, *The University in Transition:*

> The university has become one of the great institutions of the modern world. In the United States it is central in the conduct of our national life. It is the most sophisticated agency we have for advancing

> knowledge through scholarship and research. It is crucial in the transmittal of knowledge from one generation to the next. And it is increasingly vital in the application of knowledge to the problems of modern society.

This statement by James Perkins is one of the most humane I have found as a rationale for the modern university, but its assumptions are that the university is a sophisticated agency to serve the self-sufficient technology. Clark Kerr's definitive work, *The Uses of the Multiversity*, reflects the same rationale and the title of his book says it all. It cannot go unnoticed that both of these men, the ablest protagonists the universities have, are casualties of the student revolt.

One of the most noteworthy ironies of our turbulent times is the question of the relevance of the university, and I think this helps to sharpen the dilemma. The situations in which the student revolts have been most effective in bringing these massive systems to a grinding halt have been those in which the students have gathered around the irrelevance of the university. The irony here is that the university has become, in Perkins' words, "one of the great institutions of the modern world" precisely because it has proven itself to be the most relevant system ever devised for the technological society. It is the relevance, the soul destroying, efficient, totally rational relevance of the university that has brought it into mortal struggle with the "new generation"; those people of all ages whom Daniel Bell classifies as having an apocalyptic rather than a technocratic orientation toward the future. It is the relevance of this "sophisticated agency for advancing knowledge through scholarship and research" that makes it a threat to our humanity as spontaneous, valuing persons; and it is at this point that it is being challenged.

The challenge is in the form of an anti-rational revolt, a revolt against the assumption that all of reality can be perceived as *objects*—including man himself—which can be "understood" and therefore manipulated. The whole message and life-style of the apocalyptic generation is directed against these "uses of the multiversity" by the self-sufficient finitude of our technology. It is at this point that the university gets tense and defensive because it knows that its lifeline to the technology is being threatened.

What is involved here is no mere student revolt but a proteon clash of cosmic proportions over the soul of our society.

It is at this point that the cruelest irony of all appears when that great intellectual, Spiro Agnew, emerged from the citadel of our technology to defend the university from the effete snobbery of the long-haired barbarians. If I were a university president, I would be more offended by Agnew's friendship than by Abbie Hoffman's enmity. I can visualize that great Armageddon for the university with Reagan and Agnew standing back to back defending its parapets; and that is irony honed to its finest edge!

But the university is expendable. If it appears that the effete, long-haired snobs may actually interfere with the university's total relevance to the self-sufficient finitude, then the university may have to go. The centrifugal forces of more and more complex specialization in the university are preparing the way for its dismantling and transferring to the technology. As the university gets more specialized, its specialties get more independent and autonomous, with the heads of departments making their own contracts with the military-industrial-government complex, preparing the way for the dismantling of the university. This will be the form of "external integration" of the university's functions which James Perkins described in the collection of essays edited by Logan Wilson and published in 1965 as *Emerging Patterns in Higher Education.*

Fortunately, the technology is ready for this eventuality. The great industrial giants already have their "universities" in such places as Sterling Forest, the Research Triangle, Brookhaven, and others. If the apocalyptic generation really threatens to interfere with the "uses of the multiversity," it would be a simple matter to transfer the function directly to the military-industrial complex where "scholarship and research and the transmittal of knowledge" could proceed without the interruptions of the apocalyptic generation. I think this is a very real possibility and, at the modern rate of social change, it could be accomplished within President Nixon's administration.

Most of the analyses of the "university trouble" I have read continue to search for new techniques of organizing and administering and governing the university, as though we could keep

the university from flying apart if we could just improve the system. Few of the analyses confront with honesty the magnitude and depth of the conflict between the "uses of the multiversity" and the value system of the new generation.

This is the social, economic, and political context within which I propose a neo-monastic role for the church-related college. The university is expendable if its atavistic remnants of a value system get in the way of its technological relevance.

Of course, we would be naive if we did not assess accurately the tenacity of such an enormous bureaucracy as the university systems. When challenged, they will demonstrate an extraordinary will to survive. The first erosion will be in the physical sciences which have their most immediate relevance to the self-sufficient finitude. The university will go more heavily into the behavioral sciences, and it will demonstrate its relevance in these disciplines by going more to psycho-social techniques which also are among the "uses of the multiversity." But this adaptation on the part of the university will further enhance the new monachism of the private college of general education.

If I have sufficiently described the Orwellian horror, let us turn to a description of the lineaments of the neo-monachism in higher education. First, let me say that if I have overemphasized the gloom of the present situation, I have done it as a Christian. It is out of this context that the theology of hope arises. It is only in the anguish of our "sickness unto death" that the Great Physician arrives with healing in His wings. Let us consider the outlines of this form of education from the standpoint of an adaptation of the classical definition of monachism: "secluded from temporal concerns and devoted to religion."

The "seclusion" of the church-related college will be more spiritual than physical. Given the overpowering dominance of technique, some form of secluded sheltering of the spirit and intellect is necessary. If the university has succumbed to the dominance of technique, as I believe it has, then the college of humane learning must necessarily find ways of secluding itself in a wholly different style of life. Here we must draw a distinction

between seclusion and isolation. The seclusion of the college in order to devote itself to a radically distinguished educational experience does not mean isolation from the self-sufficient finitude. Rather it means a spiritual seclusion in order to confront the technology more skillfully and cogently with the values which it hopes to ignore. It could be a seclusion in order to prepare people to participate in the technology and survive as free spirits. It would be an educational experience in self-awareness that would prepare a person even for a career in the military-industrial complex. In this sense it would be in the highest tradition of thirteenth-century monachism. The objective would be to provide young people with survival skills, or in the words of Henry David Aiken: "In a world in which all moorings have been washed away, what the student needs nowadays is not an anchor, for which he no longer has any use, but a pair of compasses, a strong keel, and a first rate set of pumps."

The symbolism of the campus needs to be revived as the place where an embattled force prepares itself for the conflict against the barbarism of a value-less technology. At a time when the newest forms of higher education are becoming indistinguishable in the metropolis (as, for example, some architectural concepts for new community colleges), the architectural symbol of the campus is becoming increasingly meaningful for this form of education. We may have abandoned the ivory tower prematurely in our scramble to be useful to the technology.

This educational neo-monachism would have a purpose diametrically opposite to the assumptions underlying the "uses of the multiversity." If the dominant characteristic of the university is to make itself useful to the self-sufficient finitude, then the purpose of the neo-monachism would be to organize an educational experience around those values, external to the technology, which form the basis of man's freedom as an intuitive, spontaneous, creating, valuing creature. There would be only one subject in such a curriculum and that would be the Self, and all the disciplines of learning would become the context in which the secluded community would attempt to understand the ultimate concerns of human existence. This is what is meant by religion, or, more accurately, "the religious." To see each of the disciplines as contexts for considering the ultimate concerns of

human existence would be to place values and valuing at the center of the educational process. This, it seems to me, should be the distinguishing character of the church-related college.

This has not been the distinguishing feature of the church college. It is possible to have all the marks of visible piety overlaid on an educational method and curriculum which have been just as totally subverted by technology as the public university. It is even possible to include religion as a subject without disturbing the rational autonomy of those educational systems committed to techniques. This is religion in the interests of public service and research.

We must observe also that it is not only some church-related colleges which are attempting to turn toward an educational concept based on the ultimate concerns of human existence. Some of the most noteworthy innovations are in private colleges having no formal church relationships.

The monachism necessary for the development of this concept of education is necessary not only as protection against the omnipresent technology, but as a protection against the standardized and autonomous educational system designed to serve it. In order to gain the freedom it needs, the college needs seclusion from educators as well as from engineers.

The vestigial organizations of church colleges are likely to be more and more irrelevant because they are based on a category—that is, "church-related"—which is no longer meaningful. "Church-related" as a category no longer can serve to distinguish any set of educational institutions. On the other hand, an organization of undergraduate colleges committed to the educational implications of "the religious," as above defined, would be a meaningful category with which to characterize a group of educational institutions. This common characteristic appears to me to provide the only viable basis upon which a new relationship to the church can proceed; in effect, a new monastic order.

Obviously, the presentation of an educational ideal such as outlined here must be rhetorical and polemical. The operational

question is the difficult question. How shall this idea become incarnate in an educational institution? The difficulty is that there is no single form or method uniquely expressive of the idea. No one can point to any of the new innovative shapes of higher education now emerging and say with confidence, This is it! Neither can we be sure that established traditional colleges are totally incapable of turning more and more toward the ultimate concerns of human existence as their primary educational commitments. It is the fragility of the idea as it finds form and content which makes it so vulnerable to the omnipotent technology. This is the reason for the new monastic imperative.

The essential commitment is to the process of maturing self-awareness. Each discipline must be presented as a part of that process. This is the opposite of the presentation of the disciplines as bodies of objective data, as techniques for knowing and manipulating. Education in self-awareness would face the opposite direction—toward the aesthetic dimension. The data must not only be known, they must be appreciated and loved before they can be a part of the process of maturing self-awareness. Instead of being objective, education must be subjective.

An educational experience of this kind can be arranged only by selecting a group of scholars and teachers and administrators who believe in it passionately and are willing to run the professional and vocational risks necessary to the projection of this kind of institution.

The difficulty of projecting this kind of educational experience is great in each of the disciplines, but perhaps some of the philosophical difficulties are more immediately apparent in those disciplines most essential to the autonomous technological society; namely, the sciences. A little deeper inquiry, of course, will show that any discipline can be presented either way, but the sciences are most identified with a body of empirically derived data. How can the sciences as disciplines be turned around to provide a context for maturing self-awareness? The first answer is that scientific inquiry must first be based on a process of valuing. Truth, in this sense, is a human value to be loved passionately, not a body of data once-for-all delivered. Awareness and appreciation of the world around us comes through valuing the truth about the world.

For example, my academic discipline is geography, much neglected in general education but highly useful to the self-sufficient technology. When I finished graduate school twenty years ago, I was eager to put my discipline to use either in one of the many branches of regional and urban planning or in teaching. At that time I would have used or taught geography as an earth science. If I were to teach geography today, I would treat it as aesthetics. In general education, geography is earth appreciation and it should be presented as a process of self-awareness just as music appreciation or art appreciation. It is not enough to know *about* the Ninth Symphony of Beethoven, one must learn to *experience* the Ninth Symphony. Similarly, it is not enough to know *about* the earth. *One must experience the earth and value it passionately.* Indeed, experiencing the earth is the first step into valuing all the physical and biological sciences, and to their internalizing into a process of self-awareness. This is the pedagogical reason why, at Prescott College in Arizona, the freshman orientation is an extensive training for a wilderness experience, part of it in solitude.

This aesthetic dimension of the sciences is the only real hope of unifying and integrating a curriculum. There is no hope of integrating disparate bodies of data which are functioning under their own autonomous laws of the Technique. No amount of "interdisciplinary courses" can hold these data together. They can only be brought together by turning them around to face each other through their common aesthetic dimension. If they are turned around, all their forces are centrepetal, in self-awareness, and they cannot be separated.

The subversion of the behavioral sciences and the humanities away from the purposes of self-awareness has been more subtle than in the physical sciences but none the less real. They too must be centered around their aesthetic dimensions before they can be a valid part of this self-educative process.

What we are describing is the educative opposite of the self-sufficient finitude. This is really "the religious" in education, and this is where the church-related college should distinguish itself. I see no other possible distinction. Organization of colleges around this idea of education would be most useful both for protection of the new monachism and for mutually supportive appreciation.